

Hollyhock (Aline Barnsdall) House  
4800 Hollywood Boulevard  
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County  
California

HABS No. CAL-356

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction  
450 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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**HOLLYHOCK (ALINE BARNSDALL) HOUSE**

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

ADDRESS: 4800 Hollywood Boulevard

OWNER: City of Los Angeles

OCCUPANT: City of Los Angeles, operated by Department of  
Recreation and Parks

USE: Public Functions

**ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Hollyhock House was considered by Frank Lloyd Wright to be one of his major achievements and is so recognized by most critics. It is recognized as an historic site by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In February 1965, the Cultural Heritage Board of Los Angeles declared it with Studio-Residence "A" and the entire Barnsdall Park Site to be an historic-cultural monument.

**HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

Aline Barnsdall, the daughter of a millionaire and close friend of Emma Goldman, planned that the old olive grove that she bought in Hollywood should be the cultural center of Los Angeles. While it never quite rose to her extravagant expectations, it did provide the scene for some of the most distinguished work of America's greatest architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. He made several plans for the city block, including pools, educational buildings, shops, a theater and studios and residences for artists, as well as a sumptuous villa for Miss Barnsdall.

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Of the various projected buildings only the Hollyhock House and two studio-residences were built, comprising Wright's first completed assignments in the Los Angeles area. Of these, Studio-Residence "B" (supervised by Rudolph Schindler who strongly affected the design of the finished work) was destroyed in 1954.

In the same year, the Municipal Art Patrons, then planning a retrospective exhibit of Wright's work, asked Wright to design a gallery connecting the main house with an outer dependency. Wright volunteered his services. Since then, this gallery, with recent restoration and structural improvement, has shown a continuous series of exhibitions administered by the Municipal Art Department.

It is no wonder that Wright, in spite of the vicissitudes of time and temperamental exchange, maintained a sentimental attachment for the property to the end of his life, one of his last projects the 1954 Master Plan being another variation on Aline Barnsdall's grandiose dream.

Frank Lloyd Wright met Aline Barnsdall before his long sojourn in Japan (1916-1922) and visited with her in Los Angeles on his occasional trips home during the six years he was on the Imperial Hotel project. By 1917 he was designing the house for her and by 1918, according to Henry-Russell Hitchcock who had access to the files at Taliesin, the design was mainly complete. Work commenced with Rudolph Schindler, assisted by Wright's young son, Lloyd, supervising and preparing some drawings for the project. The structure was mostly finished by 1920.

Wright called it his "California Romanza", an allusion to the fact that the concept had nothing to do with an attempt to demonstrate modern building methods but was designed out of pure love of architecture. At the same time, he pointed out in his Autobiography, it was widely separated in its inspiration from the sentimental "pseudo-romanticism" of the Spanish Colonial revival houses going up in the Hollywood Hills which it faced--a Wrightean distinction which may be questioned. To be sure Wright did not employ the forms of Spanish baroque then so popular, but his choice of Mayan prototypes seems clearly related to the eclecticism of the times.

Dimitri Tselos has noted that Wright, like thousands of other Americans, was strongly influenced by the exotic architecture at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago and almost

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immediately put what he discovered there to work in his architecture. Among the many exhibits that he is known to have seen was a large one on Pre-Columbian art which included photographs of Mayan ruins and even plaster casts of details of these buildings. When he was planning a remodelling of his own house in Oak Park, he drew upon Mayan treatments of masses and even some details. He employed these devices again importantly in his German Warehouse (1915) in Richland Center, Wisconsin, and in much of his later work. Vincent Scully has suggested that the famous house called "Falling Water" which was designed by Wright in 1936 draws upon Mayan pyramids in its horizontal shadow lines.

The Barnsdall House (Hollyhock House) was obviously a product of Wright's interest in the strong forms of Mayan art and has its prototype in the temple form (Tselos suggests the "Temple of the Tigers" at Chichen Itza; Scully refers to "Structure 33" at Yaxchilan). The stylized hollyhock decoration, suggested by Miss Barnsdall's favorite flower and made the central motive of interior as well as exterior ornament, is, while no literal imitation of anything Pre-Columbian, treated with a Mayan attention to deep-set details which cast bold shadows across the otherwise stark surfaces.

The interior of the house, while characterized by a greater emphasis on dramatic contrast between brilliant light and deep shadow than can be found in Wright's previous work, was laid out with his usual regard for "flowing space". The magnificently proportioned living room gained great drama from the fact that it was entered from a rather narrow entrance hall and loggia or through a low-ceilinged music room, the effect being after several turns to spring out into the open of the huge space of the central hall. Otherwise the rooms were, as conventional with Wright, fairly small, sequestered from the main living area by long low corridors. The floor-plan, with its central mass supported by the two roughly balancing wings resembled the formal design of the plan for the contemporaneous Imperial Hotel and was the last essay in baroque order which Wright was to venture.

By the indenture of 1926, the house was to be used for at least fifteen years by the California Art Club which was responsible for the upkeep of the house. It is fair to say that the house was thereafter neglected, falling into such a state of disrepair that by 1946 the city was about to tear it down. At this time Mrs. Dorothy Clune Murray, an old friend of Miss Barnsdall, offered to restore the house to its original condition if the city would lease it to her for ten years and allow her to make it a memorial to her son who had died in World War II. The lease was arranged, whereupon Mrs. Murray made

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alterations and repairs which included a new kitchen and a consolidation of the two bedrooms on the patio side into a long gallery. A great deal of new furniture was also designed and built, most of it contrasting strongly with the monumental Mayanism of the original furniture.

Since 1956, when the property reverted to the city, the building has been used for official functions, concerts and meetings of local organizations. There has been much superficial damage particularly to the exterior of the house where tasteless fibre-glass roofs have been added over the pergola at the side of the inner court and over the court entrance. Major shifts in the foundation have resulted in many cracks in the exterior walls. These have been crudely sealed, thereby preventing the house from presenting the appearance of even a good ruin.

Early in 1965 a Master Plan for the development of the remaining open space on the site was completed by a joint venture of the firms of Hunter and Benedict and Kahn & Farrell Associates, architects. The plan was received and subsequently adopted by the Art Commission and the Recreation and Parks Commission of the City of Los Angeles. This plan entails a four-phase development which includes such projected facilities as a Children's Arts Center, a Municipal Art Gallery and Administration Building, an Auditorium, a Museum of City History and necessary parking and service facilities to support these developments.

The Master Plan studies prepared by Frank Lloyd Wright for the city in 1954 which provided for a grand, sweeping entrance to the hill from Vermont Avenue and Hollywood Boulevard, over a magnificent cascade of waterfalls and fountains, has been abandoned. This corner has since been commercially developed with mediocre business establishments which in fact encroach upon the hill from three sides; to the south or fourth side, along Sunset Boulevard, the hill is flanked with an impenetrable wall of high rise structures.

In February of 1965, the Historic Buildings Committee of the Southern California Chapter, AIA, submitted a proposal to offer its services toward preparing a restoration and rehabilitation study of the deteriorating Wright structures, which was promptly accepted by the Cultural Heritage Board of Los Angeles. These studies are currently continuing with the objective of restoring as well as preserving two of the most famous and important architectural monuments in the Southern California region.

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## REFERENCES

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- Frank Lloyd Wright - Vincent Scully, Jr. (George Braziller, Inc., New York, 1960), pp. 24-25. Also Plates 59-62.
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- An Autobiography - Frank Lloyd Wright (Longmans, Green and Company, New York, 1932), pp. 225-234.

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September 1965

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - Approximately 121' x 99' (not including projecting bay windows, terraces, etc.)

Wall construction - Exterior walls to a height of 6'-6" generally are hollow clay tile, stuccoed on the exterior and plastered on the interior, and set on concrete footings. There is a projecting cast concrete water table extending from grade to the finish floor elevation. At a height of 6'-6" a cast concrete belt course, extending inside to form an indirect lighting soffit in places, encircles the building.

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Above this belt course the wall is battered at an angle of approximately 10 degrees. This portion of the exterior wall is framed, using wood studs, and is stuccoed. It extends above the roof to form a parapet. Interior walls generally are wood studs, plastered. The projecting bay on the east side of the building, by the nursery, is framed entirely of wood and glass.

Porches - Garden walls, typically about 3' to 4' high, extend out from most of the major ground floor rooms to enclose terraces, patios and galleries. These walls are constructed of rubble masonry, stuccoed. The wall caps and water tables are cast concrete, repeating the detailing found on the exterior walls of the house. Large concrete plant boxes decorated with a variant of the geometric design, generally referred to as the "hollyhock" motif with respect to this structure, cast in relief, are set on the ends of some of the walls.

A roofed gallery extends 68' from the end of the motor court to the main entrance vestibule on the north side. This entry vestibule, 3' x 8', is surfaced with cast concrete, walls and ceiling. The walls are battered slightly inward. A large, wood and opal glass light fixture, using the "hollyhock" motif is recessed into the ceiling.

Two identical raised lawn terraces on the west sides of the library and music rooms, respectively, terminate in broad concrete steps leading down to the main lawn areas. On the west side of the living room, doors open directly to a small 4' x 12' porch which overlooks a square reflecting pool formed in concrete, portions of which are at varying depths, creating a geometric pattern when seen through the water.

On the south side there is a walled patio leading to another semi-circular walled terrace. French doors open from the adjoining (altered) bedrooms directly onto the patio.

The east terrace is also semicircular. There is a circular pool in the center, from which a stream of water originally led into the central garden court, and under the house to a pool surrounding the living room fireplace and out to the square reflecting pool by the living room. The water was circulated by means of a pump. Only the circular pool and the square pool outside the living room remain; the stream and the pool by the fireplace having been filled in.

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The second story portion of the house, supported by steel beams, bridges over the east end of the garden court, forming a 16' x 26' covered area. The gallery on the south side of the garden was enclosed by an open wood trellis, with battered sides, above the typical 3' masonry wall. Both this gallery and the loggia to the west have recently been covered with a corrugated plastic roof, supported on steel posts. A concrete staircase, adjacent to the loggia, leads up to the roof terraces.

The master bedroom balcony on the second floor forms a roof for the nursery room loggia below. The loggia is enclosed with wood trellage similar to that in the garden court.

Typical doors (exterior) are outswinging glazed French doors with screens on the inside. Both doors and frames are oak. Casings are square cut and plain. Stiles are narrow, about 3" and the glass is set in square cut applied stops which project slightly. Doors measure about 6'-6" in height and fit under the concrete belt course. Mullions are oak. Cast concrete piers decorated in relief, or stuccoed masonry piers also serve as both door and window mullions. The double in-swinging front entry doors are cast concrete with specially cast bronze hardware.

Operating windows are out-swinging oak casements similar in detailing to the French doors. Wood sills, where occurring, are placed on top of a cast concrete sill. The windows extend to the floor in most instances, however, and are set between masonry or cast concrete piers, often directly into grooves cast or cut into the concrete. Many of the windows, both fixed and operating, are decorated with geometric leaded glass patterns consisting of small bits of white or violet glass combined with clear glass.

"Scissors" trusses 16" apart, built up out of wood studs, supporting wood decking and composition roofing, with quarry tile surfacing on portions. Much of the roof was designed to be used as a promenade deck. Concrete or quarry tile staircases decorated with plant boxes and concrete finials, grouped in pairs, using the typical "hollyhock" motif ~~for the roof~~, connect those portions of the roof which are at varying heights. Recently the roof has been resurfaced using gravel in some areas and concrete in others. The original quarry tile promenade decks are no longer visible. Wood treads now cover most of the roof staircases. A 3' to 4' parapet surrounds the main roof; water being conducted off the roof by area drains instead of exposed downspouts. Wood framed



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clerestory bands of windows project above the main roof. These occur over portions of the dining room and entry areas, and above the living room fireplace.

The 6'-6" high belt course can be considered a cornice. It is concrete, left unpainted, as are all of the cast concrete elements in the house. Square in section, the belt course projects slightly, incorporating an integrally cast drip, and measures 11" in depth. Resting on this belt course is a cast concrete frieze with relief decorations repeating the shape of the cast concrete "hollyhock" motif finials on the roof, sometimes in an abbreviated form.

A long pergola, incorporating dog kennels, originally extended north from the servants quarters to the garage. This now forms a portion of the west wall of the art gallery, intended to be a temporary structure, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and later modified by others. A grove of Italian cypress trees, which have mostly disappeared, once surrounded the house. Cast bronze pole lights with geometric decoration light the driveways and walks through the grounds, including the flight of stairs which extended along the main axis of the house from the circular pool down the hill to the east. This walk has now been partially closed off by a fenced area, now used for storage purposes. A pump house exhibiting the same design and construction details as the main house still stands at a lower elevation to the southeast of the main structure. It includes a small room of about 10' square enclosing a pool. Also included originally within the grounds ~~and designed by Frank Lloyd Wright~~ is a concrete block terrace which has a wood trellis overhead, and is constructed over the foundations of another never completed Wright building, known as the "Little Dipper."

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## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### INTERIOR

Floor Plan - A study of the architect's drawing, (Revised September 10, 1920) reveals modular grid layout lines spaced at approximately 20'-0" c.c. each way; there are no dimension lines shown. At first glance the arrangement appears very casual and informal, even rambling. However, on closer inspection, one can comprehend a very masterful control of spaces, axially related and carefully planned. Interior spaces are extremely fluid in their interpenetration. Only a few private areas are completely sequestered by solid walls and doorways. There is an ever present awareness of the effects of light and shadow, of exterior vistas and enclosed garden courts, interior compositions which direct the eye to focal points of interest, the counterpoint of varying levels working against and with each other, of the surprise and emotional impact induced by the unexpected changes of direction and turns in plan circulation which lead from space to space, each new area differing from the last by the dramatic increasing or decreasing of ceiling heights or by unexpected variations in architectural treatments. But throughout the entire handling of the interior spaces there is an unquestionable unity of feeling in the use of integrated ornament (uniquely Wrightian) as well as of color and materials.

The orientation of Hollyhock House, with its principal axes aligned along east-west and north-south directions, was actually the focal point of the entire projected Master Plan for the Barnsdall Art Center as conceived by Wright. This was explained and diagrammed by his son Lloyd Wright at a recent interview.

The main entrance to the house is from the north through a small enclosed paved court, flanked on the west by an exterior low ceilinged loggia, with intermittent views of a large lawn terrace. On the east was a long series of animal shelters which has since become the west wall of the "temporary" Art Gallery also designed by Wright and completed in 1954. Entering from the north loggia through a pair of cast cement doors, one steps into a small, low ceilinged foyer having a planter and glass faceted screen on the right and the dining room, at a three-step higher level on the left. Beyond the dining room is the kitchen, remodeled in recent years, and an interior stairway leading to a service area below.

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From the foyer, passing through a small open reception area, one steps down into the large, high ceilinged living room, about 44' x 24', opening on the west through French doors with a view across a small pond overlooking a gently sloping lawn area. At the eastern end of the room, French doors open out to the central inner garden court. At the southeast corner of the living room, up one step, a small vestibule area leads along a short hall, past a 16' x 20' study with its own private garden view.

Across the hall, a long projection of the plan originally contained two guest rooms, each about 24' x 18'. These rooms have been changed to become one long gallery. French doors on the north open to the above mentioned inner garden court. On the south side, French doors lead to a walled garden court which is flanked on the west by a 10' x 13' room, formerly the conservatory, and on the east by three rooms labeled "Children's Rooms" on the plan with a "Nurse's Room" to the north. On the second floor above these rooms was a master bedroom and bath. This low ceilinged bedroom is now a private study (used by the Olive Hill Foundation) and has a sunken bay on the east with five full height casement windows overlooking a private landscaped garden below. This sunken bay was apparently a reading and sitting area.

Flooring - Exposed hardwood flooring is 1" T&G oak, over a sub-floor and wood joists. Most floor coverings were carpets, but the originals have been replaced. Early photos reveal a semi-recessed carpet detail, similar to the present, which employs a flat curved 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " oak mold acting as an edge band around the carpet and following the perimeter of the room. Between molding and wall is a narrow band of exposed hardwood flooring. Lloyd Wright states that the original carpet was deep piled, designed by his father in a characteristic geometric pattern and hand woven in China. Some floors such as at the foyer and dining room have cork tile apparently of more recent times.

Walls - Interior faces of some exterior walls, such as at the living room and related areas, are paint finished over poured concrete or cement block. The living room areas have pronounced pilasters ornamented with cast cement detail, in highly original abstract geometric forms (based on the hollyhock motif) or contrasting, plain cast cement plinths at projecting walls. Typical interior non-bearing walls are wood stud and plaster. The dining room walls are finished with "Genevro" hardwood paneling (explained by Lloyd Wright to be a type of South American mahogany) 11' wide vertical panels, separated by a 7/8" wide decorative band,

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recessed  $\frac{1}{2}$ " into the face of the panels. The gallery (former guest rooms) has been refinished with combed plywood.

Trim - The living room has a 2'-0" high oak wainscot divided into two horizontal bands by a decorative trim that is used typically throughout the house. This trim is  $\frac{7}{8}$ " wide, recessed  $\frac{1}{2}$ " and composed of a connecting series of octagonal shapes at  $\frac{7}{8}$ " c.c. A 13" wide, applied oak mold at the east wall of the living room extends from the base at the corners of the room, up to projecting soffits and miters over the French doors as an architrave. An 8" high oak fascia is used at concealed light coves. A  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " wide oak casing runs continuously under the light cove soffits. Oak moldings are also used to accent the hipped ceiling joints of the living room. Oak bases vary from  $5\frac{1}{2}$ " to 10" in height; 10" cast cement plinths are used at pilasters.

Doorways and Doors - 6'-6" high, typical, solid flush panel oak (and fumed oak finishes) with  $\frac{3}{8}$ " x  $1\frac{3}{4}$ " oak trim casings and applied stops.

Hardware - Original interior hardware, where still found, are standard mortised locks and metal knobs at interior doors. Exterior French doors and casement type windows have bronze operators and fittings.

Fireplaces - One of the most notable interior features is the projecting face of the living room mantel which is formed of cast cement units and is designed in a bas relief of abstract shapes, curves and geometric linear patterns. Originally, the hearth was a sunken pond, long since filled in. Above the fireplace is a sloping skylight screened on the interior with an intricate, hardwood grille, over which a curtain could be drawn when desired. Other fireplaces are much smaller and less imposing, but typically trimmed with simple geometric shapes of cast cement units.

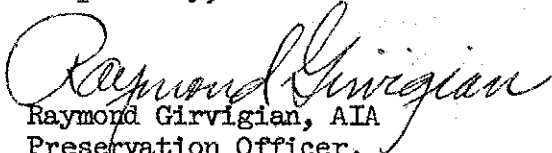
Ceilings - Finishes are typically of plaster. The living room and study have a hipped ceiling which expresses the roof construction above. Lower projecting ceilings, extending from related areas, penetrate into the higher ceilinged living room and continue around the periphery to become concealed light troffers or coves. Sloping ceilings are found in the gallery (with concealed lights above) and also in the kitchen. Lloyd Wright states that the living room

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ceiling was originally finished in "high color" geometric patterns designed by Wright, featuring shades of blues, violets, rusts, oranges, etc., which he still remembers. These have long since disappeared. The present color of ceiling and walls is a light buff.

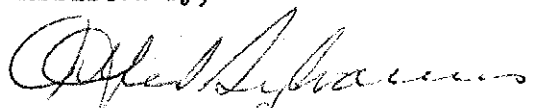
Miscellaneous - Reference should also be made to built-in hardwood cabinets, book shelves, furniture, screens, semi-recessed and recessed light fixtures, polychrome faceted door lights and sidelights and a host of other special and custom fixtures and ornamental features designed and installed under the architect's supervision. Only a careful, detailed on-site study by the student, professional or layman can do actual justice to the extensive and highly imaginative ideas of structure, form, space and ornament as found in this house, which is certainly one of the most unique expressions of early modern architecture in the world today.

Prepared by,

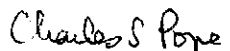
  
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National Park Service

DATE: October 6, 1965

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